

REMARKS/ARGUMENTS

Claims 1, 9, 10, 14, and 16 have been amended. Claims 2, 8, and 15 have previously been canceled. No claims have been added. Claims 1, 3–7, 9–14, and 16–21 remain in the application. Reconsideration of the application is requested.

Summary of the Amendments

Amendments to the Specification

A new paragraph has been added to explain the meaning of the term “wherein the projection and the fastener retaining means are in substantially the same plane as the body.” This text merely explains a feature that is clearly shown in FIGS. 3 and 5 and does not add any new matter. Note that the projection was already described in Claims 1, 9, 10, 14, and 16 as originally filed as “being provided in substantially the same plane as the body.”

Amendments to the Claims

Claims 1, 9, 10, 14, and 16 have been amended to include the limitation that the fastener retaining means are in substantially the same plane as the body. Support for this limitation is found in the specification as originally filed, in FIGS. 3 and 5.

Substantive Rejections

Rejection of Claims 1, 3–7, 9–11, 14, and 16–20

The Examiner has rejected Claims 10, 11, and 14 under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b) as being anticipated by Brown (US 3,235,927). Brown teaches perpendicular projections 22 for preventing a line or cord from slipping off a projection.

The Examiner has rejected Claims 1, 3–7, 9, and 16–20 under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Ackerman (US 5,772,371) in view of Brown. Ackerman discloses the field of the invention, including a “substantially” annular body defining an interior open space having therein a projection 2 for receiving a cord, line or loop. Ackerman fails to disclose fastener retaining means as claimed, but Brown teaches perpendicular projections 22 for preventing a line or cord from slipping off a projection. Thus, according to the Examiner, it would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time of the invention to provide an expanded portion to the end of the projection of Ackerman as taught by Brown.

The rejections of Claims 1, 3–7, 9–11, 14, and 16–20 will be addressed together. The claims as amended are not anticipated or rendered obvious by any of the cited publications, because none discloses a retainer in the same plane as the body. The only publication that discloses a form of retainer is Brown, and in that document the retainer projects perpendicularly to the plane of the body.

The Examiner states on page 5 of the final Office Action that he considers it would be obvious to combine Ackerman with Brown. However, the applicant respectfully submits that such a combination would not arrive at the invention as claimed. Furthermore, the arrangement disclosed in Ackerman teaches retention arrangements adjacent to the base of the projection, using contours of the body. In column 4, lines 9 to 13 of Ackerman, “gapes” are described as being shaped to provide constriction so that once engaged with the prong, a net strand is difficult to disengage. This is in contrast to the invention as claimed, where the retention arrangement is provided at the distal end of the projection.

The foregoing amendments also address the Examiner's comment under item 8 on page 4 of the final Office Action, where he states that the reference to the projection being provided in the same plane as the body does not positively recite that all portions of the projection reside within the plane. The foregoing amendments clarify this point.

Rejection of Claims 12, 13, and 21

The Examiner has rejected Claim 12 under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Brown. Brown fails to show "strip material," as he employs cord or rope. However, according to the Examiner, such are considered to have been equivalents in the art, as would be recognized by the ordinary routineer working in the art. Substitution of such equivalents would, in the Examiner's view, provide results exactly as would be expected.

Regardless of whether Brown would have led one skilled in the art to substitute strip material for cord or rope, Brown does not provide the missing teaching of a projection and a fastener retaining means in substantially the same plane as the body. Accordingly, Claim 12 is believed patentable.

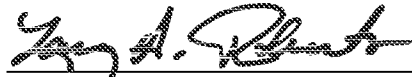
Claim 13 is rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Brown in view of Zutten *et al.* (US 5,482,757). Brown fails to disclose a cover over the connector. Zutten teaches provision of cover flaps over connectors. According to the Examiner, it would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time of the invention to provide a connector covering portion to Brown as taught by Zutten *et al.* Such a combination would have been desirable so as to provide for safety of individuals, such that the connectors are not snagged. Claim 21 is rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Ackerman in view of Zutten *et al.* as applied as above.

Regardless of whether Zutten would have led one skilled in the art to provide the with a covering portion as taught by Zutten, neither of these references, separately or in combination, provides the missing teaching of a projection and a fastener retaining means in substantially the same plane as the body. Accordingly, Claims 13 and 21 are believed patentable.

The Commissioner is hereby authorized to charge any additional fees and credit any refund to Deposit Account No. 11-0855.

The foregoing is believed fully responsive to the Final Office Action dated October 8, 2008. Applicant respectfully requests that a timely Notice of Allowance issue in this case.

Respectfully submitted:



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